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ABSTRACT

The empty nest has been thought to be associated with low morale among women. The emphasis on the mother role among Mexican American families may result in a stronger negative association between low morale and the empty nest among Mexican American women than among white women. This study tests two hypotheses: first, that the empty nest is associated with aspects of low morale among both Mexican American and white women; and second, that this association is stronger among Mexican American than among white women, ages 45-74. A probability sample of 254 Mexican American and 255 white female residents of Los Angeles County, ages 45-74, were identified as empty nest or full nest by the criterion of having someone 18 or under living in the home. A scale tapping four dimensions of morale (sadness, boredom, loneliness, and usefulness) was administered. Frequency analysis was performed and epsilons were computed to determine the effect of the empty nest on these Mexican American and white women in three age cohorts, 45-54, 55-64 and 65-74. Results suggest that the empty nest may not be a crucial cause of low morale among women. The relationship between the empty nest and these indicators of low morale among Mexican American women was unclear, and there was negligible association of the empty nest with low morale among white women. (Author)

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The Effect of the Empty Nest on the Morale of Mexican American and White Women

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Abstract

The empty nest is thought to be associated with low morale among women. The emphasis on the mother role among Mexican American families may result in a stronger negative association between low morale and the empty nest among Mexican American women than among white women. This study tests the hypotheses that (a) the empty nest is associated with aspects of low morale among both Mexican American and white women, and (b) this association is stronger among Mexican American than among white women, ages 45-74.

A probability sample of 254 Mexican American and 255 white female residents of Los Angeles County ages 45-74 were identified as empty nest or full nest by the criterion of having someone 18 or under living in the home. A scale tapping four dimensions of morale (sadness, boredom, loneliness, and usefulness) was administered. Frequency analysis was performed and epsilons were computed to determine the effect of the empty nest on these Mexican American and white women in three age cohorts, 45-54, 55-64 and 65-74..

Results suggest that the empty nest may not be a crucial cause of low morale among women. The relationship between the empty nest and these indicators of low morale among Mexican American women was unclear, and there was negligible association of the empty nest with low morale among white women. The results indicate a need for multivariate study of factors (including the empty nest) affecting women's morale.

The Effect of the Empty Nest on the Morale of Mexican American and White Women

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The empty nest, that time in a family's life when there are no longer children in the home, is a relatively new mass phenomenon brought about by increasing longevity, by families having fewer children and by their having them earlier in marriage as compared with earlier years (Cutler and Harootyan, 1975; Glick, 1975). Because of the changes in family structure and the resulting loss of role and lack of role models for the postparental married couple, this stage has been considered a troublesome period, especially for women.

Results of research, however, have been inconsistent in showing this period to be troublesome. Studies, almost all of which focus exclusively on white women in the United States, deal with the effects of the empty nest on morale, on the marital relationship, and on the woman's relationship with her absent, adult children.

Effect on Morale

Although there has been much speculation, there has been little research on the effect of the empty nest on the morale and happiness of women. Most theorists (Frank, 1956; Fried, 1967; Havighurst, 1960; Parsons, 1955) and some researchers (Canaday, 1966; Neugarten and Guttman, 1968) see the postparental period as one of major role loss, and the success with which a woman faces this loss as depending on the part her children have played in her life and on her ability to take on new roles. The problem, according to most, is that the postparental role is so new that no models or clear norms have yet been developed

except the norm of not interfering in adult children's lives (Neugarten, Moore and Lowe, 1968).

Other writers see these years as offering great promise to women, but, as noted above, the rewards appear to come to those who can make a transfer from the role of mother to some other kind of satisfying role, who have not invested all of their emotions and interests in their children (Davidorff and Markewich, 1961; Lopata, 1966), or who have cultivated leisure time activities throughout their lives (Bromley, 1967; Canaday, 1966; Sussman, 1960).

Early studies indicate class differences in the perception and enjoyment of middle age and the empty nest stage. Neugarten and Peterson (1957) found that upper-lower class people saw middle age as a period of decline, of feeling one's self to be a "has been." Lopata (1966) found that while wives of working men tended to list much dissatisfaction with life at middle age, the upper status middle-age woman, because she had the money to maintain health, to entertain, to travel, and to do all the things she could not do while her children were at home, enjoyed middle age.

Effect on Marital Relations

What happens to the marriage of the woman experiencing the empty nest? Again, the literature is inconclusive. Some writers see this as a bleak crisis period; others see it as a happier time. Desmond (1956), Franzblau (1971) and Purtell (1963) noted that, according to divorce statistics, peak periods of divorce are during the first five years and after 18 or 20 years of marriage. As contributing factors, they list middle-age boredom, middle-age discontent, and middle-age fatigue, along with the realization many couples feel, when their children leave home, that they no longer have anything in common. Other studies list disenchantment, devitalization, conflict, and passive acceptance, but little satisfaction among upper middle-class couples (Bossard and Bell, 1955; Cuber and Haroff, 1963).

A second group of theorists and researchers finds evidence that the postparental period is or can be just as satisfying as earlier periods (Axelson, 1960; Deutscher, 1968; Glenn, 1975; Havighurst, 1960; Sussman, 1968). These studies indicate that husbands and wives appreciate the increased leisure, the lessened financial responsibility, increased freedom to travel, and the freedom from housework and children-related chores. This greater enjoyment may depend, however, on having the financial resources needed to enjoy increased leisure with one's husband. Deutscher (1968) found that upper-middle class spouses had a more favorable outlook on postparental married life than did lower-midddle class couples.

A third group views the postparental period as neither necessarily happy nor unhappy, but as a time of decision when the marriage relationship may move either toward greater intimacy or toward greater incompatibility (Gravitt, 1953; Simon, 1968; Thompson and Streib, 1961). These authors contend that for successful transition, new modes of relating must be worked out between postparental wife and husband and that it is likely that poor marriages remain poor, but good marriages may improve.

Effect on Relationship with Adult Children

Finally, how does the postparental role affect the parent-child relationship? Popular literature, as exemplified by Slater (1970), often describes the parent-child relationship as one of rejection of parents by children whose lives have served as vicarious substitutes for satisfactions the parents failed to find in their own lives and a resulting separation by adult children from their parents.

Sussman and Burchinal (1968) maintain, however, that adult children and their parents do not separate, that there is a modified extended kin family network in the United States, highly integrated within a network of social

relationships and mutual assistance, and that nuclear family living, independent of kin, is not the present form. Although this nuclear pattern may have existed and prevailed during the transition from a rural to an urban society, it appears not to have been permanent. According to these authors, although the nest is empty, contact with children tends to be maintained. Help patterns take many forms, flowing in several directions and involving exchanges of gifts, services, advice, and financial help. Sussman and Burchinal (1968) found that this family continuity was inversely related to social status; the higher the social class, the less the degree of family continuity and the greater the change in use of leisure time after children have left home.

Hill's study (1968) of 100 sets of three generations of families supports Sussman and Burchinal (1968) by giving evidence of several thousand exchanges of help between generations and evidence of close kinship networks rather than isolated nuclear units. Despite this evidence of a modified extended kinship network in contemporary America, the definition of the nature of this kinship and its relationship to the empty-nest phenomenon is unclear.

The Question of Ethnicity

The literature reviewed indicates the extent of variability of response by contemporary American white women to the empty-nest period. To talk therefore of consequences of the empty-nest stage for American women is misleading if one does not deal with some of the differences within the American culture; role transitions such as the transition to the empty-nest role are differently patterned within the social structure, especially according to one's social class, ethnic background, and occupation (Clausen, 1972). Socioeconomic class differences in response were found by some researchers (Deutscher, 1968; Sussman, 1968). Ethnic differences may also exist. The studies reviewed above, however, investigated only white Americans, and, as a result, did not attempt to answer the obvious

question of ethnicity: Is response to the empty nest by women of ethnic groups similar to that of white American women?

To begin answering this question one must begin to look outside the white community to other major American ethnic groups. The focus of the present investigation is on the Mexican American woman's experience of and response to the empty nest in comparison to that of the white American woman.[1] Such an investigation will add to the growing body of knowledge about aging Mexican Americans and should also help clarify sources of differences in American women's responses to the empty-nest period.

Ethnic Differences in Empty-Nest Patterns

Because of fertility patterns, reduced longevity, and Mexican American cultural traditions, one might expect to find that the empty-nest phenomenon is not experienced by many Mexican American women because they continue their role behavior of raising children and grandchildren through the middle years and beyond (Ragan, 1973) and because they less often live to old age.

Demographic data and at least one research study support this expectation. Mexican American women have more children and have them over a longer span of time than do white American women. In 1971, 76% of Mexican American families as compared with 55% of white families of all ages had children under 18 living in the home (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1971). Bremer and Ragan (1976), in a study of 244 Mexican American and 255 white women ages 45-74 in Los Angeles, found that 65% of the Mexican American women but only 25% of the white women studied had someone 18 or under living in the home.

Not only do Mexican American women have more of their own children living in the home over a longer span of time than do white women, but the extended family pattern of caring for grandchildren seems to contribute to the assurance for the Mexican American woman of a mother role over a large part of her lifetime (Clark, 1971; Sotomayor, 1973). Among the women in the Bremer and Ragan

study (1976) far more Mexican American (44%) than white women (3%) lived in homes where granchildren were present.

Ethnic Differences in Response to the Empty Nest

Mexican American and white American women, then, tend to have different empty-nest patterns. Fewer middle-aged and aging Mexican American women than white women experience the empty nest. It is likely that the two groups of women also differ in their response to the empty nest when it does occur. The extent to which an empty nest influences a woman depends to some extent on the value placed on the mother role by the culture in which the woman lives (Burr, 1973; Sussman, 1960). Studies indicate that the two cultures under discussion differ in the extent to which women value the mother role; the familial values of the Mexican American culture (Clark, 1969; Maldonado, 1975; Montiel, 1973; Sotomayor, 1973) contribute to a greater emphasis on the mother role as a woman's most important role than is present in the white culture. If this emphasis does exist, then the empty-nest phenomenon, when it does occur, could be expected to lower the morale of both Mexican American and white American women, but its effect would be greater on Mexican American women. Two related hypotheses, therefore, are suggested:

1. Because of the primary importance of the mother role in both Mexican American and white American cultures, there will be a larger percentage of empty-nest women than full-nest women in each ethnic group experiencing low morale. Among white women, investigation of this hypothesis is limited to the 45-64 age span because there was only one white woman in the 65-74 age subsample with a full nest. For Mexican American women, the whole age span, 45-74, will be studied.

2. Because the Mexican American culture attaches greater importance to familial roles than does the white American culture (Clark, 1969; Maldonado, 1975;

Montiel, 1973; Sotomayor, 1973) there will be a stronger negative association between morale and the empty nest among Mexican American women ages 45-64 than among white women of the same ages.

Method

Sample

Data for this analysis were drawn from a large scale study of aging, "Social and Cultural Contexts of Aging: Implications for Social Policy," conducted in 1974 by the Andrus Gerontology Center of the University of Southern California. A multistage area probability sample of white, Black, and Mexican American residents of Los Angeles County was designed to include equivalent numbers of the three subpopulations, three age strata (45-54, 55-64, and 65-74), and two socioeconomic status levels. A total of 1269 interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish.

Two subsamples from the survey are analyzed in this investigation. The subsamples are all of the 254 Mexican American and all of the 255 white women, ages 45-74, interviewed in the survey. Since the total sample was stratified on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age, statistical weighting procedures were used to approximate samples representative of the populations in Los Angeles from which they were drawn.

Measures

On the assumption that a woman may play a mother role not only to her own children but also to anyone 18 or under with whom she lives, "empty nest" was operationally defined as a home with no one 18 or under living in the household. "Full nest" (a term also used in this discussion) was operationally defined as "nonempty," that is, having someone 18 or under living in the home. (The "full nest" usage is admittedly quite awkward, involving as it does a double negative, but the meaning seems clear because "empty nest" is such a common expression.)

Women were identified as full-nest or empty-nest women on the basis of their responses to the interviewer's request, "First, I would like to make a list of all the persons who live here as members of your household." Further questioning elicited information about age and relationship to respondent of all persons living in the household. This set of questions, therefore, gave some description of the people making up the full nests.

Eleven items in the instrument were included to tap aspects of respondent morale. From these eleven, four items were chosen for analysis in this investigation because these four were assumed to be those aspects of a woman's morale most likely to be influenced by the advent of the empty nest. The four questions used in the present analysis were: (a) "Do you feel bored?" (b) "Do you have a lot to be sad about?" (c) "Do you feel lonely these days?" and (d) "As you get older do you feel less useful?" Respondents answered, "Quite often," "Sometimes," "Hardly ever," or "Don't know," to each question. A response of "Quite often" was assumed in this investigation to indicate dissatisfaction with one's life or lowered morale in the area mentioned (boredom, sadness, loneliness, and usefulness).

Findings

Morale of Empty-Nest vs. Morale of Full-Nest Women

The hypothesis that because both Mexican American and white cultures emphasize the mother role as a major role in a woman's life, then more empty-nest than full-nest women in each culture will experience low morale received ambiguous support (Epsilon 1, Table 1).

Boredom--Mexican American and white women. The findings indicate that the empty nest is not appreciably associated with feelings of boredom of either Mexican American or white women. The empty nest-full nest differences range from 0% for Mexican American women at each age span to 3% for white women at the 55-64 age span. This 3% difference is so small that the data

on boredom cannot be said to support the hypothesis.

Sadness--Mexican American women. The data on the sadness of Mexican American women are puzzling and cannot be considered supportive of the first hypothesis. Most noticeable in these data is the range of Mexican American women feeling sad quite often (9%-24%). Almost one-fourth of both the 45-54 age span full-nest women and of the 65-74 age span empty-nest women reported feeling sad. These percentages are larger than that of Mexican American women at any age span quite often feeling bored or lonely, and are matched only by the percentage feeling less useful among the 55-64 age empty-nest and 65-74 full-nest women. Feelings of loneliness and boredom may contribute to feelings of sadness; the percentage feeling sad may be larger because that feeling is a more inclusive feeling than the others and may overlap them.

Lack of support for the hypothesis is indicated at all age spans, but particularly at the 45-54 age span. Among the 55-64 and 65-74 age span women, the empty nest-full nest differences (4% and 9% respectively) are in the hypothesized direction but are not large enough to be considered strongly supportive of the hypothesis. But among the 45-54 age span women, an appreciably larger percentage of full-nest (23%) than empty nest (11%) women reported feeling sad, indicating an association, but not in the hypothesized direction.

Further research is needed to investigate the sources of sadness evidently felt by a sizeable percentage of these Mexican American women. It would be interesting to look at Mexican American women at younger age spans to see if there are other age peaks in percentages expressing extreme sadness. The empty nest is evidently not strongly associated with this sadness, particularly at the 45-54 age span.

Insert Table 1 about here

Sadness--white women. Only six white women ages 45-64 reported quite often feeling sad and while these six represented a larger percentage of empty-nest (4%) than full-nest (2%) women, the 2% difference is so small that it must be concluded that the data do not support the hypothesis.

Loneliness --Mexican American and white women. Among both Mexican American and white women, this first hypothesis received slight support from the data on loneliness, most strongly evident among the 65-74-age Mexican American women (11% empty nest-full nest difference) and among the 55-64-age white women (6% empty nest-full nest difference). Among both subpopulations the difference was greatest at the highest age span. Interpretation of the importance of these differences, however, requires more data and further research to determine whether they indicate a trend toward a stronger association of loneliness with the empty nest as Mexican American and white women grow older.

Feeling less useful--Mexican American women. At the 45-54 age span similar percentages of Mexican American full-nest and empty-nest women felt less useful these days (8% and 10% respectively); the empty nest did not seem to be associated with feelings of being less useful at this age span.

At the 55-64 age span, however, there was an appreciable difference between the percentages of full-nest and empty-nest women feeling less useful (12% and 23% respectively). Some of the empty-nest women at this middle-age span probably had had empty nests over a longer period of time than those in the 45-54 age span and it is possible that, though there may be a certain

relief at first when one's children leave home (and one's feelings of uselessness are overshadowed by relief), after a few years with no children in the home, a sense of needing something worthwhile to do sets in and some women begin to feel less useful.

It is probable that a larger percentage of these 55-64 year old than 45-54 year old women are widows and the combination of widowhood and an empty nest means they experience a double role loss. They may, therfore, more often experience feeling less useful. Although further research is needed to delineate the sources of the difference in impact of the empty nest on Mexican American women at these two age spans, at this 55-64 age span the hypothesis is supported.

The most surprising result in this investigation is the percentage of Mexican American full-nest women ages 65-74 reporting feeling less useful (65%), a much larger percentage than that of empty-nest women in the same age span (14%, a difference of 51%). Having an empty nest at this age span seems to be strongly associated with these Mexican American women's feelings of usefulness, but the association is in a direction opposite that hypothesized. This surprising result will be examined in greater detail below.

Feeling less useful--white women. Over the total age span 45-64, the empty nest seems to have little association with white women's feelings of usefulness (empty nest-full nest difference of 2%). But when one examines the two age spans separately, one finds some support for the hypothesis at the 45-54 age span where there is an empty nest-full nest difference of 7%. At the 55-64 age span, however, the effect was reversed; 15% of the full-nest as opposed to 8% of the empty-nest women felt less useful, a puzzling result which needs further investigation for clarification.

Comparison of the Effect of the Empty Nest on the Morale of Mexican American and White Women

It was expected that Mexican American women would be more adversely influenced by the advent of the empty nest than would white women since the Mexican American culture places greater stress on familial roles than does the white culture. This difference should be reflected in appreciable positive epsilon 2 results in Table 1. As mentioned above, since there was only one white woman in the 65-74 age span with a full nest, the comparison between the two subpopulations was limited to the 45-54 and 55-64 age spans.

Boredom. The second hypothesis that there would be a stronger negative association between morale and the empty nest among Mexican American than among white women was not supported by the findings on boredom. At each ten-year age span and for the overall 45-64 age span, the difference in the association of the empty nest with feelings of boredom of Mexican American and white women was negligible (2, -3, and -2 respectively).

Sadness. There was a striking difference in feelings of sadness of Mexican American and white women, but the empty nest situation does not seem to be associated with that difference. At both age spans, with both empty nests and full nests, larger percentages of Mexican American than white women reported feeling sad. At the 45-54 age span, there was, as predicted, a greater empty nest-full nest difference among Mexican American than among white women, but the appreciable difference (-17%) was in a direction opposite that hypothesized; a larger percentage of Mexican American full-nest (23%) than empty-nest (10%) women at this age span felt sad quite often.

Loneliness. This second hypothesis received little support by the findings on loneliness. At the 45-54 age span there was a slight ethnic difference (6%) in association of the empty nest with feelings of loneliness, but this

difference is so small that it must be considered negligible support of the hypothesis.

Usefulness. The hypothesis received firm support from the findings on usefulness at the 55-64 age span. At this age span the ethnic difference in association of the empty nest was pronounced (epsilon 2 = 18); almost one-fourth of Mexican American empty-nest women at this age span reported feeling less useful. Among white women at this age span, however, the association was in an opposite direction; a larger percentage of full-nest (15%) than empty-nest (8%) white women ages 55-64 reported feeling less useful.

At the 45-54 age span the hypothesis was not supported. The association of the empty nest with women's feelings of uselessness was slightly greater for white women than for Mexican American women (epsilon 2 = -5).

Discussion

The above summary of findings indicates a variability and complexity present but not often recognized in studies of the empty nest. This complexity warrants further study. In this investigation, the nature of the full-nest situation of the 65% of the full-nest 65-74 year-old Mexican American women who reported feeling less useful is most ingriguing. That situation might be imagined. It is likely that the children making up the full nests of these women are largely the women's grandchildren (Bremer and Ragan, 1976); that these women were born in Mexico (Bremer and Ragan, 1976); and that they may be living, not in their own homes, but in their children's homes (Torres-Gil, 1976). For women born in another country in the years 1900-1909 it is possible that not living in one's own home and living with young people around, while alleviating loneliness (none of these women quite often felt lonely), boredom, and sadness, may accentuate the changes that have occurred in the past 65-74

years and make more salient the feelings that one is living out of one's time and one's place. Such feelings would contribute to a sense of not quite belonging and consequently to feelings of being less useful than in the past.

The questionnaires of these 65% of the 65-74 year-old full-nest Mexican American women were examined to determine if the conditions described above did exist and to determine other possible influences which might cause these women to feel less useful.

Examination of the questionnaires of these eight women[2] revealed that these women were primarily Mexican-born (7), Spanish-speaking (7), widowed (6) women with little formal education (1-10 years) and low incomes (6 were in the $2,000-$2,999 annual income bracket). Most (5) had previously worked outside the home, primarily as laborers, to help support their families. Although none were presently working outside the home, five said they would like to be working now. Only two of the women (the two who were currently married) lived in homes of their own. All the widowed women lived with younger relatives, usually with children and their families, but in one instance with a nephew and his family (this woman had no children of her own). Six of the women considered their health to be only poor or fair although two women said their health was good or very good. These latter two women considered themselves very happy whereas five of the less healthy women considered themselves as not too or pretty happy.

Two Women

A closer examination of the responses of two of the women may illustrate some of the specific pressures and supports that affect the morale of aging Mexican American women as well as illustrate the variability that may exist within the Mexican American ethnic group.

Senora Torres[3] is a 66-year-old Roman Catholic widow who lives with her daughter, son-in-law, their three children (ages five to eight) and another granddaughter (age five, child of a son now in prison) in a five-room home owned by her daughter. Senora Torres was born in Mexico, but moved to the United States when she was seven years old. She went to school four years, one of those years in Mexico. Although she has been in the United States 59 years, she is more comfortable speaking Spanish than English and the interview was conducted in Spanish. As a younger woman she worked in a garment factory and she would like to be working now but her arthritic condition prohibits this. Her family never has had much money (her husband was an auto mechanic) but financially things are worse now than before; her annual income is between $3,000 and $3,999 and a small part of that must be paid to her daughter for rent. Although she considers herself pretty happy, she worries continually about her health, her financial condition, and especially about her son in prison. She expects to live at least twelve more years, but she sees few advantages to growing old and pictures those next twelve years as more unhappy than the present ones. In reviewing the financial, health, and family problems experienced by Senora Torres, one may see why she quite often feels less useful these days and one may conclude with her that "life is hard."

The life of Senora Garcia who also has a full nest and who also often feels less useful is considerably different. Senora Garcia is 65-years-old, Protestant, married, and living with her husband, son, daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren in a ten-room home owned by Senora Garcia and her husband. She was born in the United States, had five years of formal education, and chose to speak English for the interview. She has not worked outside the home but has spent her married life taking care of her home and family. Her husband, a

retired carpenter, has always provided a good living for them and his retirement income of $6,000 to $6,999 is considered adequate by Senora Garcia although prices are high and five people depend on that income. In contrast to Senora Torres' interview, Senora Garcia's interview conveys a mood of happiness, activity, and optimism. She considers her health to be very good and expects to live 20 more years; she is very happy and thinks things are better than she had thought they would be. A very religious person, she spends a lot of time singing with her husband in the church choir and she talks confidently of the Lord talking to her. Her children are important to her and one of the good things about being her age (she considers herself to be young) is having more time to spend with her children. She is sure that if necessary her children would take care of her rather than putting her in a nursing home; the ten-room house was purchased so there would be room for children and grandchildren when necessary.

One may wonder why Senora Garcia, with her happy, full, active life should feel less useful these days. It is possible that being busy and having grandchildren in the home does not give a Mexican American woman like Senora Garcia the same sense of usefulness as did taking care of her own six children. Perhaps in Senora Garcia's case a sense of usefulness did stem from her mother role and that other roles, though enjoyable, have not provided that same sense of being useful to others.

It is important to recognize in Senora Garcia's interview that a feeling of being less useful does not necessarily mean feeling unhappy or dissatisfied with life. Her happiness does not seem to depend on her feeling useful.

The contrast between the lives and overall attitudes of Senora Torres and Senora Garcia, both of whom quite often feel less useful these days, should

make one aware that simplistic conclusions based on too few factors may well be misleading. Senora Torres and Senora Garcia are both Mexican American, both have full nests, and both feel less useful these days, but otherwise their lives and feelings are very different. Their lives illustrate the variation that exists within the Mexican American culture and the consequent necessity for ethnic researchers to include investigation of variability within as well as between ethnic groups in their studies.

Summary and Conclusions

In this study, the relationship between the empty nest and indicators of low morale among Mexican American women was unclear and there was negligible association of the empty nest with low morale among white women.

Surprisingly, the highest percentage of Mexican American women reporting that they felt less useful as they grew older actually occurred among the older full-nest women. The eight cases in this category tended to be Mexican-born, Spanish-speaking, widowed women of low education and income, in fair or poor health, who lived in homes of their children and grandchildren.

Two contrasting cases of women in this category were selected for further description, and the differences between the two women showed how variable are the situations of older Mexican American women who still live in homes where there are children.

If other factors could be held constant, it might be that having one's own child, a grandchild, or some other child in the home would be associated with greater happiness and higher morale. It is possible, however, that living in circumstances such as in the home of an adult child and grandchildren is itself associated with factors such as poverty, low education, widowhood, and

loss of independence, factors which detract from happiness in the later years. These results indicate the need for multivariate investigation of the factors (including the empty nest) affecting women's morale.

Table 1

Differences in Percentages of Empty-Nest and Full-Nest Mexican American and White Women Ages 45-74 "Quite Often" Feeling Bored, Sad, Lonely, and Less Useful[4]

Age	Mexican American (N=244) Empty Nest (N=97) %	Mexican American (N=244) Full Nest (N=148) %	Epsilon 1[a]	White (N=255) Empty Nest (N=190) %	White (N=255) Full Nest (N=64) %	Epsilon 1	Epsilon 2[b]
Bored							
45-54	10 (2)[c]	10 (9)	0	5 (3)	7 (3)	-2	2
55-64	3 (1)	3 (1)		3 (2)	0 (0)	3	-3
65-74	5 (2)	5 (1)	0	--	--	--	--
Total Ages 45-64	5 (3)	8 (10)	-3	4 (5)	5 (3)	-1	-2
Total Ages 45-74[a]	5 (5)	7 (11)	-2	--	--	--	--
Sad							
45-54	10 (2)	23 (22)	-13	6 (4)	2 (1)	4	-17
55-64	13 (5)	9 (3)	4	2 (1)	0 (0)	2	2
65-74	24 (9)	15 (3)	9	--	--	--	--
Total Ages 45-64	12 (7)	20 (25)	-8	4 (5)	2 (1)	2	-10
Total Ages 45-74	17 (16)	15 (28)	2	--	--	--	--

[a] Empty nest-full nest percentage differences

[b] Mexican American-white epsilon differences

[c] Numbers in parentheses are cell frequencies.

Table 1 (continued)

Age	Mexican American (N=244) Empty Nest (N=97) %	Mexican American (N=244) Full Nest (N=148) %	Epsilon 1[a]	White (N=255) Empty Nest (N=190) %	White (N=255) Full Nest (N=64) %	Epsilon 1	Epsilon 2[b]
Lonely							
45-54	10 (2)[c]	3 (3)	7	6 (4)	5 (2)	1	6
55-64	10 (4)	3 (1)	7	6 (4)	0 (0)	6	1
65-74	11 (4)	0 (0)	11	--	--	--	--
Total Ages 45-64	10 (6)	3 (4)	7	6 (8)	3 (2)	3	4
Total Ages 45-74	10 (10)	3 (4)	7	--	--	--	--
Less Useful							
45-54	10 (2)	8 (8)	2	9 (6)	2 (1)	7	-5
55-64	23 (9)	12 (4)	11	8 (5)	15 (3)	-7	18
65-74	14 (5)	65 (13)	-51	--	--	--	--
Total Ages 45-64	18 (11)	9 (12)	9	8 (11)	6 (4)	2	7
Total Ages 45-74	17 (16)	17 (25)	0	--	--	--	--

[a] Empty nest-full nest percentage differences

[b] Mexican American-white epsilon differences

[c] Numbers in parentheses are cell frequencies.

Footnotes

[1]Only the white subsample was chosen for contrast with the Mexican American data because the question addressed was whether the Mexican American experience of the empty nest was distinct in contrast to the prevailing pattern. Black women in the survey were very similar to white women in the numbers at each age with children at home.

[2]There were eight individual women in this category; the frequency (13) given in Table 1 reflects the effect of weighting.

[3]"Senora Torres" and "Senora Garcia" are pseudonyms, used to assure the anonymity of the respondents.

[4]Tests of statistical significance were not used in this analysis. The sample was stratified on race, SES, and age, and assumptions of simple random sampling did not apply. Furthermore, weighting in the Mexican American and white subsamples was carried out around the mean weight in each subsample (thus preserving the actual number of cases in each subsample), and combining the two subsamples in an analysis of statistical significance of differences would have been inappropriate.

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